

*** NETANSWERS INTERNET EXTRA ***

*** Number 46: What is Whois? ***

Have you ever wondered who owned a certain domain name? When you want to find out what person or company owns a domain name and how to contact them, the tool to use is "Whois". Who what?

Whois is the program that will tell you all about a domain name, including who owns it, who runs it, as well as a few technical details. Why would you want to do this? Whois is not one of those tools that most of us need to regularly use, but it can occasionally be invaluable.

A domain name identifies an Internet host. For instance, yahoo.com, mids.org and k12.ca.us are domain names. Let's look up a domain name with Whois, then we'll look at the information that it provides -- and see how that information can be useful. To use Whois to get information about a .com, .org or .net domain, point your web browser to <http://rs.internic.net/cgi-bin/whois> -- in the space provided, type the domain name you are investigating and press return. Let's see what we can learn about askjeeves.com, the research tool I talked about in issue #43. Here are the results:

Registrant:

David Warthen (ASKJEEVES-DOM)
2131 University Ave., #212
Berkeley, CA 94704
USA

Domain Name: ASKJEEVES.COM

Administrative Contact:

Warthen, David (DW5161) dwarthen@ASKJEEVES.COM
(510) 649-1985

Technical Contact, Zone Contact:

ISI Operations Center (ISI-NOC) noc@ISI.NET
(888) 541-9888

Fax- - - (408) 541-9878

Billing Contact:

Warthen, David (DW5161) dwarthen@ASKJEEVES.COM
(510) 649-1985

Record last updated on 15-Mar-98.

Record created on 29-Nov-95.

Database last updated on 31-Oct-98 04:06:23 EST.

Domain servers in listed order:

NS1.ISI.NET	205.216.163.20
NS4.ISI.NET	204.152.166.73

Whois reveals quite a lot of information. First, we have the name and address of the person who owns that domain name, followed by a confirmation of the domain name, then contact information.

The InterNIC provides for three distinct contacts: administrative, technical and billing. Here we can see that the administrative and billing contacts are the same, giving us a clue that this domain name is probably owned by a small operation rather than a big corporation. The technical contact is different -- with a name like ISI Operations Center, it's a good bet that ISI is the name of the Internet service provider or web hosting service where askjeeves.com lives.

Next we see some date information -- The "Record created" field tells us that the domain name has been around since 1995. "Record last updated" tells us that the owner, domain server, or some other information about this domain name was changed back in March. The "Database last updated" field tells us the last time the InterNIC's domain name database was maintained. This happens once a night, so the date shown is the day before I wrote this.

Finally, Whois shows the domain name servers for askjeeves.com. This is a list of name servers that are in charge of translating that domain name to numeric Internet addresses. These technical data are not too useful to most of us.

Let's jump back up to the contact information, which can be the most useful element of a Whois lookup. We're provided with names, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, a postal address, and sometimes fax numbers of the people behind this domain name. A word of caution -- if you're tempted to contact any of these people -- especially by phone -- you should have a very good reason. (Calling to say "I can't get to you web site" or ask "How does this work?" isn't a good reason.) Sending e-mail is a safer way to go.

But there are reasons to pick up the phone. I once subscribed to a mailing list which I later decided I didn't like. I tried to unsubscribe -- again and again my unsubscription requests and polite e-mails were ignored. After weeks of receiving e-mail from a list that I couldn't unsubscribe from, I picked up the phone to call the technical contact. I explained the situation, and the problem was quickly corrected. I have also used the phone and fax numbers to complain about "spam" -- unsolicited commercial e-mail messages. When complaining via e-mail doesn't work, calling a spammer's ISP can make your annoyance heard by someone who can make a difference. These instances are few and far between.

Remember, all of the information in the Whois database is public information. If you ever register your own domain name, you can expect to receive junk mail to the postal address listed in the Whois database.

InterNIC handles domain names that end in .com, .org and .net. Other domains, such as .gov, .mil and country-coded domains like .us and .jp, are handled by other organizations. There are many Whois databases for various countries. To search for anything other than .com, .org and .net, you'll have to access a different database. For example:

- .gov domains (US government): <http://www.nic.gov/cgi-bin/whois>

- .mil domains (US military): <http://www.nic.mil/cgi-bin/whois>

- .us domains: <http://www.isi.edu/in-notes/usdnr/rwhois.html>

- European domains: <http://www.ripe.net/db/whois.html>

For other domains, try the Allwhois web site at <http://www.allwhois.com>

==*== SITES MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE ==*==

Whois for .com, .org, .net: <http://rs.internic.net/cgi-bin/whois>
Whois for .gov, .fed.us: <http://whois.nic.gov/cgi-bin/whois>
Whois for .mil: <http://www.nic.mil/cgi-bin/whois>
Whois for .us: <http://www.isi.edu/in-notes/usdnr/rwhois.html>
Whois for European domains: <http://www.ripe.net/db/whois.html>
Allwhois, for all domains: <http://www.allwhois.com>

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The NetAnswers Internet Extra is free to all CompuServe members. It's available in the Internet New Users Forum (GO INETNEW) in file library 11, "NetAnswers".

Got comments or ideas for future issues? We want to hear 'em. Just send a message to savetz@compuserve.com (74774,2725).

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